

A Peer of the Press: Lord Atholstan,  
the crusading baron of the fourth estate

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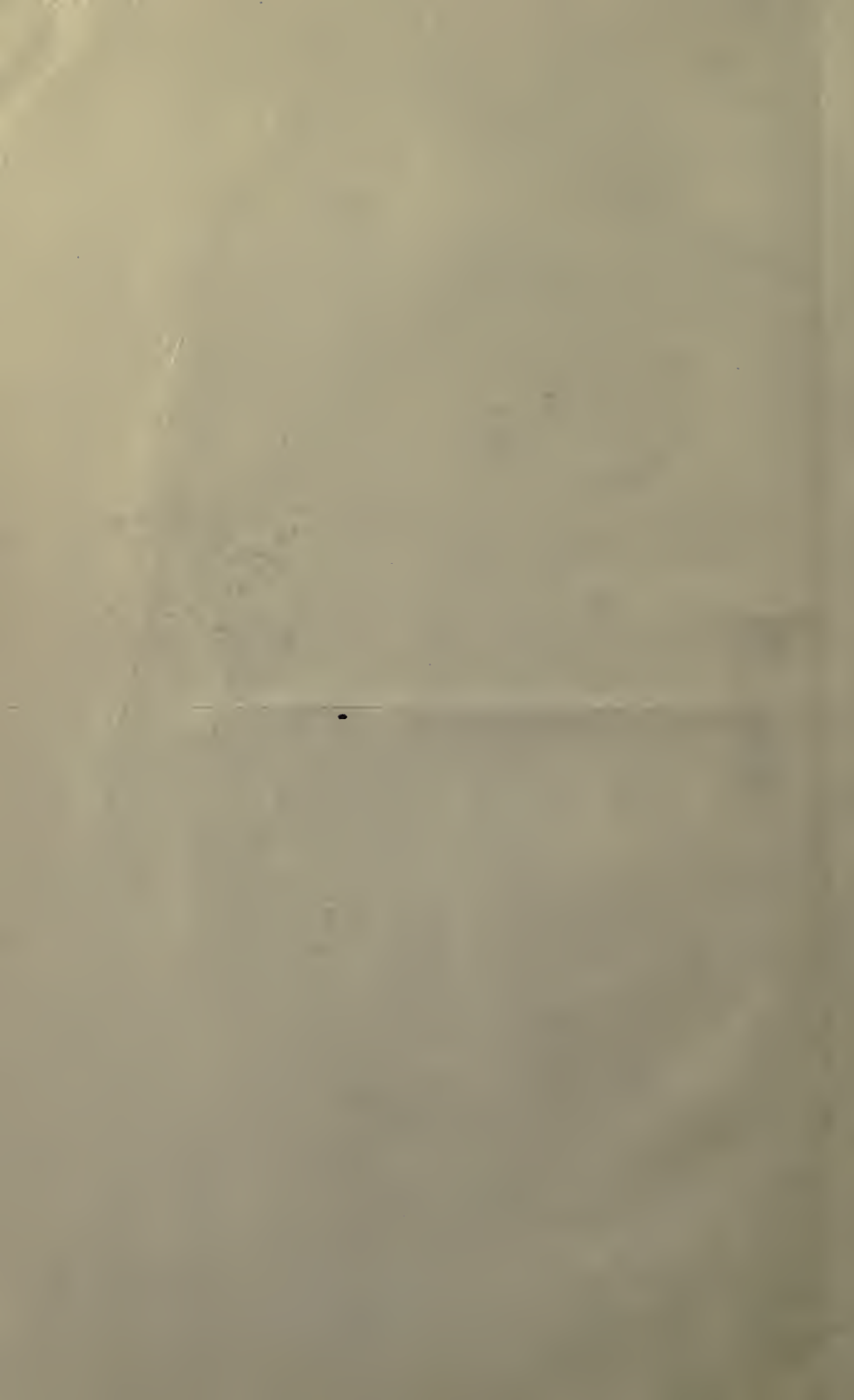
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## "A Peer of the Press"



Lord Atholstan

*The Crusading Baron of the Fourth Estate*



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# "A Peer of the Press"



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Lord Atholstan

*The Crusading Baron of the Fourth Estate*

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## --- A PEER OF THE PRESS ---

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From the Huntingdon Gleaner, Huntingdon, Que.

In a deep, newly constructed basement on St. James St., Montreal, a battery of giant newspaper presses have been comparatively recently installed, and are the last word in printing machinery. They supplement the formidable battery, which in the press-room of the adjoining building are daily pouring forth the editions of one of the greatest journals in the British Empire—the Montreal Daily Star. On the day the first roar ascended, sitting in his office on the second floor of the old building was found a silvery haired gentleman whose countenance mocks his four-score years. We may readily imagine that his thought centered on a day sixty years ago, when, deprived of steam power by an irritated creditor, he walked an old white horse into a tiny press room and harnessed it to a farming contraption which slowly and groaningly turned his feeble press.

Confederation had just become a reality when Hugh Graham, not yet twenty-one years old, with less than a hundred dollars launched The Evening Star. Today, Lord Atholstan is one of the mightiest forces in the fourth estate. To the betterment of his less fortunate fellows he has contributed millions of dollars; his philanthropies, often unheard of by the public at large, are as startlingly great as they are modestly bestowed. His record as a Canadian citizen and a staunch Imperialist is as sterling as his aversion to the limelight is pronounced. It is doubtful whether his full story ever will be told. But at least this chapter will serve to indicate its drama.

### Honor Thy Father

Hugh Graham, the first Baron Atholstan in the peerage of the United Kingdom, was born on July 18th., 1848, in the Province of Quebec, near the little Huntingdon County village of what was then St. Michael's, but is now Athelstan. He is the son of R. W. Graham, a landowner of the district, and his wife, Marion Gardner, both of them natives of Scotland. Lord Atholstan has that filial affection which is characteristic of the Scot. In his comfortable but modestly furnished office in the Montreal Star building, there hang portraits of notables along with scenes of foreign travel, but pride of place on his desk—the only photograph so honored—is the picture of his father. To the casual observer, Lord Atholstan is a man without sentiment. Of that maudlin kind which is best termed sentimentality, he is quite free, but no one who has ever managed to catch his shy glance at that photograph will ever charge him with neglect of that virtue that is based upon observance of the Fifth Commandment.

There are still men living in the Huntingdon district who can recall R. W. Graham. They remember him as a Scottish gentleman of the old school, kindly, shrewd, far-seeing, of tireless energy and stern integrity. There are stories still told of his sterling probity, (a transaction) and of his scorn of a subterfuge such as might keep a transaction within the letter of the law but not within its spirit. His word was his bond. It was in this atmosphere that Hugh Graham was brought up. As a boy he attended the Commissioners School at Hinchinbrooke, where his teacher was Joshua Breadner, father of R. W. Breadner, Commissioner of Taxation for Canada.

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At the age of thirteen he entered the Huntingdon Academy, and remained there the greater part of two years. There he came under the tutelage of the late J. I. Maclaren, afterwards Mr. Justice Maclaren, of Toronto. For his teachers, Hugh Graham has always had the highest regard, until the ties of affection, welded into something like veneration, were cut to death.

At school Hugh Graham showed no signs of exceptional brilliance, although he excelled in two subjects—arithmetic and grammar. Doubtless home influence had something to do with his success in mastering grammar, for his mother was a stickler for correct diction. The cult of the proper usage of the common rules of speech and writing has remained with him throughout life. Today, Lord Atholstan abhors the vulgarity of slang and despises slovenly English. Even after words have been adopted in current usage he looks at them with suspicion.

Hugh Graham was just fifteen years old when he first wetted his feet on the marge of the pool of journalism. At that age he entered the service of his uncle, Edmund Henry Parson, a well-known journalist of the day, who published the Commercial Advertiser of Montreal, and afterwards the Evening Telegraph. Lord Atholstan is exacting in his standards of journalism. He has to his credit considerably more than half a century of active journalistic work, and his regard for the work of his uncle in the editorial field is still deep and sincere. "One of the most brilliant editorial writers of his day in all Canada," was the epitome he gave his uncle's intellectual powers a few years ago, when time might have been expected to have dimmed the lustre of his fame, or subsequent leader writers to have eclipsed that renown.

Hugh Graham neither expected nor received any special privileges when he entered the office of his uncle. He started as an office boy. In three months he had been promoted to be assistant bookkeeper and in six months he was head bookkeeper and cashier. One year after entering the employ of The Evening Telegraph, he was manager of the concern, in which post he remained for two years. During those years, at an age when many boys are still in High School, Hugh Graham was mastering all the intricacies of publishing. Even then he had a passion for ferreting out information, which he stored in a retentive memory against the day when he could draw upon it to his own advantage.

### The Star is Born.

While Hugh Graham was at the Telegraph his success was not passing unnoticed. After two years' service with his uncle, he received an offer from the late John Lowe and Brown Chamberlain to assume the business management of the Montreal Gazette. Anxious to secure a wider experience, but with plans already laid for a still more ambitious career, Graham accepted. He had not been many months on the Gazette before he struck up a friendship with George T. Lanigan, also employed on that paper, and now best remembered as the author of that little masterpiece of verse, "The Ahkoond of Swat." He had read widely and was interested in a score or more different subjects. Above all, he was a brilliant descriptive writer at a time when there was far less scope for such work than there is today. Graham, with that intuitive judgment of men that has been one of the greatest factors of his success, divined this brilliance and hit upon the idea of founding a newspaper. Graham at that time was just turned twenty and Lanigan, his senior by four years. They were absolutely without capital. The daring of their venture may be excused by their youth.

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Together, they started *The Evening Star*. For a long time its existence was precarious. The business office was at 64 St. James Street, while there were tiny editorial rooms at 9 Ste. Therese Street. The price of *The Evening Star* was one cent, and it consisted of four pages of six columns each, or twenty-four columns in all. Of these, fourteen were filled with reading matter and ten were devoted to advertising. There was less than a hundred dollars in the treasury when *The Evening Star* began to shine in the world of journalism.

Lord Atholstan alone knows of the struggles that the young paper passed through in its cradle days. There is a tradition that so hard were the young owners pressed for funds to carry on their enterprise, that on more than one occasion the pennies handed over the counter by the newsboys were rushed over to the firm supplying the paper with an order for more sheets in order that the full issue might be printed.

X After three years of trial and worry Lanigan severed his connection with the paper and accepted a journalistic position in Chicago at a handsome remuneration. While Lanigan was glad to be relieved of the burdensome anxiety, the real cause of the severance of his partnership was an unbridgeable difference in a matter of policy. Lanigan, with the backing of a prominent Montreal capitalist, wanted to advocate annexation of the new country to the United States, primarily to attract attention to the paper, but Graham held out staunchly for the British connection. Nearly forty years later this issue was again brought up in acute form, and Hugh Graham and his newspaper became no small factor against Reciprocity in a memorable federal campaign.

In spite of the fact that they agreed to differ, Lanigan and Graham remained friends. Yet the severance of the partnership placed a heavy burden of debt on Graham's shoulders, for he assumed all the crushing liabilities of the firm. The principal creditors came forward with an offer to give the struggling publisher a discharge and set him on his feet. Graham would have none of it. He resisted the temptation. All his early training had tended to create an abhorrence of debt, and he declared that he could never live in Montreal if he once became a bankrupt. He ultimately paid every creditor in full, with interest, and the whirligig of time brought him a strange reversal. Many years afterwards, Hugh Graham, risen to the possession of wealth that would have sounded like a fairy story in those struggling days, found an opportunity to give a strong helping hand to his creditor of those early days when the latter had met with reverses and was faced with bankruptcy.

### Struggles and Law-suits.

For six long years the struggle continued. Often the situation seemed hopeless, for it was a case of making bricks without straw. There was no working capital, and advertisers were slow in paying. There were constant suits and writs of attachment. Few newspapers have had a greater surfeit of law than the *Star* in the struggling days of its infancy. Before it was out of the woods and firmly established, *The Star* had defended ninety-three libel suits, and of this number it is on record that only three were lost.

Credit was so low at one time that coal had to be bought by the bucketful and paper by the ream. Then came a crisis, when a neighbour, who had been supplying the plant with steam power by means of a shaft let through a hole in the wall, threatened to stop the supply

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unless arrears were immediately paid up. It was a time for quick action. A wire was sent to the country for a horse-power machine that had done yeoman service on many farms, and for a horse to operate it. The horse treads were set up in a corner of the press room, and the motive power walked sedately into the office every morning through the little counting house to a flat machine capable of printing on one side of the paper only. When the press stopped every few minutes to draw its fresh supply of white sheets, the horse, relieved of his labors, would see visions of green meadows and start off at a gallop, setting up a deafening noise. Dobbin was pensioned off after a short term of service and an engine installed that balked far more than the horse. It was no uncommon thing in those days for a call for help to be sent out by the pressman, which would be answered by the book-keeper, the clerk and the two reporters, who comprised the bulk of the staff, manning the Ericsson machine and aiding in the work of getting out the paper by tugging at the piston rods when they refused to function.

Dogged determination and a fighting spirit that refused to accept defeat triumphed in the end, and while it is difficult to fix definitely the turning point in the fortune of the *Star* and its publisher, the election of 1878 saw the paper firmly established. The *Family Herald* and *Weekly Star* was also launched on its career toward success about this time.

It was in 1874 that the *Star* first came out openly in favour of a tariff policy in a campaign for Canadian industry and for the Canadian manufacturer. This was three years before Sir John A. Macdonald adopted the National Policy, and the great Conservative leader did not hesitate to give credit to the *Star* for its inception of the movement.

The endorsement of the National Policy in the general election of 1878 gave the *Star* considerable prestige, and from that date it made steady headway, through which it had to compete with two old and well established rivals, the *Montreal Herald* and the *Montreal Witness*.

But if The *Star's* freedom from financial worry dates from the days of the National Policy, its journalistic prestige is of earlier vintage. Its first successes in the news columns came in 1870 during the Franco-German War. Its news service, despite the limitations of the age, was excellent and reliable, and the *Star* won favour by its accuracy and by beating out its rivals on several history-making events.

### **Fought Smallpox Epidemic**

But Hugh Graham did something more than achieve business success and set his newspaper on a sound financial footing. No sooner was he relieved of his worries and anxieties of publishing than he set himself to use implements which he had fashioned by his own efforts in causes for the betterment of his less fortunate fellowmen and for the improvement of the city in which he had won success.

### **A Great Epidemic of Smallpox Broke Out**

There was at the time a physician in the city named Dr. Coderre who was conducting an anti-vaccination campaign with vigor and with success. Tens of thousands of Montrealers had never been vaccinated, and Dr. Coderre was able to convince these people that vaccination was dangerous and unclean. Matters came to a crisis when, after several threats, cities of the province quarantined Montreal and refused to accept goods and merchandise originating there. There was no place to isolate the victims of the scourge, and many of the poorer people fought against their relatives being sent to a fever hospital as strenuously as they fought vaccination.

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The situation was very grave, when Hugh Graham took the initiative and called a meeting of the leading men of the city to discuss plans and suggest a remedy. Those present at that meeting were: Hon. Donald A. Smith (afterwards Lord Strathcona), Andrew Robertson, Senator James Ferrier, W. C. Macdonald (Sir Williams), Andrew F. Gault, David Morrice, Thomas G. Shaughnessy (Lord Shaughnessy), George Stephen (Lord Mount Stephen), William Wainwright, Henry Hogan, Richard White, John Kerry, D. G. Torrance, Walter Paul, Donald MacMaster, William Clendinneng, Henry Lyman, George Craig, Arthur Boyer, James O'Brien and R. R. Grindley.

The meeting was held at the Star office and there were some strong speeches made protesting against the city's inactivity in devising measures to check the epidemic. The aldermen seemed paralyzed, and there is no doubt that one of the most powerful restraints against any effective coping with the plague was the mischievous propaganda of Dr. Coderre. At the end of the meeting Hugh Graham expressed the opinion that under no circumstances would the aldermen be moved to action. He proposed, therefore, that twenty of those present should march directly to the City Hall while the Council was in session and offer to take charge of the whole situation, putting up a bond of \$20,000 as a guarantee of good faith for the accomplishment of their plans.

The Council asked for twenty minutes for deliberation. At the end of that time, while they rejected the proposal of the citizens to take full control, they permitted them to name six members to be added to the Board of Health. The members chosen for this work were George E. Desbarats, Richard White, Louis Perrault, W. Masterman, A. Levesque, and the moving spirit of the affair, Hugh Graham.

Steps were immediately taken to secure a sufficient number of practitioners to vaccinate the stricken and to counteract the campaign of Dr. Coderre. At the first meeting of the newly organized Board of Health the new members, inspired and urged into action by Hugh Graham, proposed most drastic remedial measures and a comprehensive scheme for vaccination and isolation. The regular members of the Board of Health took fright and deserted their posts, leaving the work to Hugh Graham. He did not hesitate to go personally into houses and tenements where the sick lay in order to explain to the relatives of the patient how necessary vaccination and isolation were.

Isolation still remained the bugbear, and until there was proper isolation of the patients it was obvious that there could be no expectation of eradicating the plague, or even keeping pace with it. There was no contagious diseases hospital in Montreal at the time, and Hugh Graham, to whom had been specially allotted the duties of solving the isolation and hospital issue, cast a covetous eye on the exhibition buildings beyond Fletcher's Field. To a request for the use of them the exhibition authorities gave a point blank refusal, but this did not disturb Hugh Graham. He quickly got in touch with the authorities at Ottawa and, having explained the situation to them, received permission to call out the Victoria Rifles in order to obtain entrance into the exhibition grounds if necessary, on the score of the public emergency.

No publicity was given to the affair, but the regiment left its headquarters quietly with its colonel, Fred Henshaw, at its head, accompanied by Graham acting as guide and representative of the city. These grounds covered an area of about twenty acres and occupied what later became known as Montreal Annex and is now generally known as the North End. Arrived there, they were met by the secretary

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of the exhibition, the late Sam Stevenson, who barred them entrance. Nothing daunted, Hugh Graham climbed over the gate and threw back the wooden bar. The soldiers fled in and set up their tents on the grounds. Within four hours the ambulances were bringing the patients from the city to be cared for by sisters and nurses and attended by a strong corps of physicians. By the next day the buildings were completely transformed into an isolation hospital. The plague was checked, thanks to the determination and courage of the man who engineered the assault—Hugh Graham.

We have related this incident at some length for two main reasons. In the first place, it shows an aspect of the man that is typical of many of his enterprises. It is often said of Lord Atholstan that his methods of attacking a problem are devious and subtle. While he is admittedly a master of strategy in the conduct of any campaign in which he is taking a leading part, the truth is that his favourite plan of attack (certainly the one he has generally adopted) is the assault direct. He likes to mobilize all his forces for a thrust, and then deliver sledge hammer blows in a frontal attack. Perhaps the very simplicity of his methods misleads his antagonists, but it is certain that he has won most of his victories by hammering away with thundering blows until he has found the weak spot in the opposing battlements. Once the breach is made, he goes forward to victory.

### A Modern Crusader

Then again, the fight against smallpox was an issue to his liking. In matters of public health he fights with the zeal of a crusader. For years he campaigned to obtain a pure water supply to replace the polluted sewerage which was bringing sickness and death to hundreds of houses. Later he waged unceasing warfare for a pure milk supply and it was through his hammer blows in *The Star* and by the organization of citizens he built up, that Montreal adopted pasteurization.

His campaigns for civic betterment were endless. On one occasion, in April, 1888, he went so far as to organize a company of judges, lawyers, business man and citizens generally—the famous "Pick and Shovel Brigade"—to clean St. James Street of ice, snow, and filth, which had put a stop to vehicular traffic, when the aldermen had conspicuously failed to do their duty; and he succeeded in shaming the civic authorities into action. Lotteries, gambling-dens, bucket-shops, usury sharks, and flim-flam schemes were particular objects of his detestation, and he initiated and carried through many campaigns against them.

Lord Atholstan is first and last an Imperialist, and the best interests of the British Empire as a whole have been kept in view in his consideration of public affairs. He was one of the first to advocate Imperial preferential trade as a policy.

His action at the outbreak of the South African War, in October, 1899, was characteristic of the man. For a time it seemed doubtful whether Canada would hasten to the assistance of the Mother Country, as other parts of the Empire were spontaneously doing.

When word reached Canada that New Zealand was sending troops, Hugh Graham wired the news to the municipal heads of the cities, towns and villages all over Canada, and to prominent militia officers and leading public men, irrespective of party, asking them if they thought Canada should do as New Zealand had done, or stand aloof. Would they wire for publication their views as to Canada's duty in the crisis?

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The response was overwhelming. There came a perfect outburst of patriotism from every province. The dispatches filled several pages of *The Star*, and within forty-eight hours men were being assembled for the first contingent. As an incentive to prompt recruiting, it was announced that the men of the contingent would be insured against death and accident in policies aggregating one million dollars. The name of the person who paid the premiums remained a secret for a considerable time, but eventually it became known that it was Hugh Graham.

His ardent patriotism blazed out once more when war was forced upon the Empire by Germany in 1914, and his course in the crisis was that of a man of action. His own opinions were known to all Canada, for he had a thousand times over declared that Canada's plain duty in the event of such a crisis would be to exert her whole strength at once in the cause of the Empire; and he knew his fellow Canadians too well to doubt that they would respond with enthusiastic loyalty to the appeal.

On November 9th., 1908, the honor of knighthood came to him from His Majesty King Edward VII. through Earl Grey, Governor-General of Canada, in recognition of his services in many public and philanthropic enterprises, and particularly in recognition of his services of an Imperial character.

On February 12th, 1917, the crowning honor of his life came to him—his elevation by King George V., through the Duke of Devonshire, to the Peerage of the United Kingdom as Baron Atholstan of Huntingdon, in the Province of Quebec, and of the City of Edinburgh, Scotland.

Lord Atholstan has always been proud of the name of journalist; and his services to his brethren of the fourth estate have been many. He was a delegate to the Imperial Press Conference held in London in 1909, and was selected to reply to Lord Rosebery's great speech at the memorable banquet. While in Great Britain he received the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws from the Scottish University of Glasgow. He was elected a vice-president of the Institute of Journalists of Great Britain in 1910.

### **Philanthropic Work.**

For the past forty-five years or more Lord Atholstan has been identified with all the principal patriotic movements in Canada. No project of Imperial or philanthropic concern has ever failed to receive his earnest, concentrated attention, and his enthusiastic support when once he is convinced of its genuineness and its efficiency. He was the originator of many philanthropic enterprises of a notable character. When the great famine was raging in India, in 1897, its horrors moved him, and he set on foot a movement for raising a relief fund in Canada, to which finally one hundred thousand people sent in contributions, amounting to nearly \$100,000. He initiated, organized and gave strong financial support to the Fresh Air Fund during a period of over forty years, for the purpose of giving working mothers and poor children a glimpse of country life and a bit of country health. This work began as long ago as 1887, and countless women and children have been greatly benefited. In 1903 he personally bought and presented to the Fresh Air Fund a large summer home and grounds situated at Chambly, Que. He gave \$100,000 to the Imperial Cancer Research Fund of London and offered \$100,000 more as a prize for the discovery of a medicinal cure for cancer. The war upon tuberculosis has also engaged His Lord-

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ship's attention and activity, especially in his latter years. In 1926, he founded the Anti-Tuberculosis and General Health League in Montreal. At the meeting at which it was established a letter was read from His Lordship stating that he would immediately place at the disposal of the executive of the League the sum of \$100,000. to be drawn upon as required for the prosecution of the work. He subsequently added \$50,000, all of which was expended in preliminary work, preparatory to a general health survey of the city.

When the devastation of Belgium by the Germans shocked the civilized world, in the early days of the Great War of 1914-18, he initiated a Shilling Fund for the suffering children of that country to which over 200,000 children contributed.

Since 1920 Lord Atholstan has been a member of the governing board of McGill University. In the great drive for funds made on behalf of the University towards the close of 1920, he served, with characteristic energy, as chairman of one of the committees. His personal contribution to the McGill fund on this occasion was \$100,000, of which \$60,000 was to build the Moyse Hall and \$40,000 to endow in perpetuity three travelling scholarships in memory of the late Dr. Charles E. Moyse, for many years Dean of the Faculty of Arts.

These are only some of his larger public donations. In private, his generosity has been boundless, and no one can tell how much he has given away, regardless of the creed or nationality of the recipient.

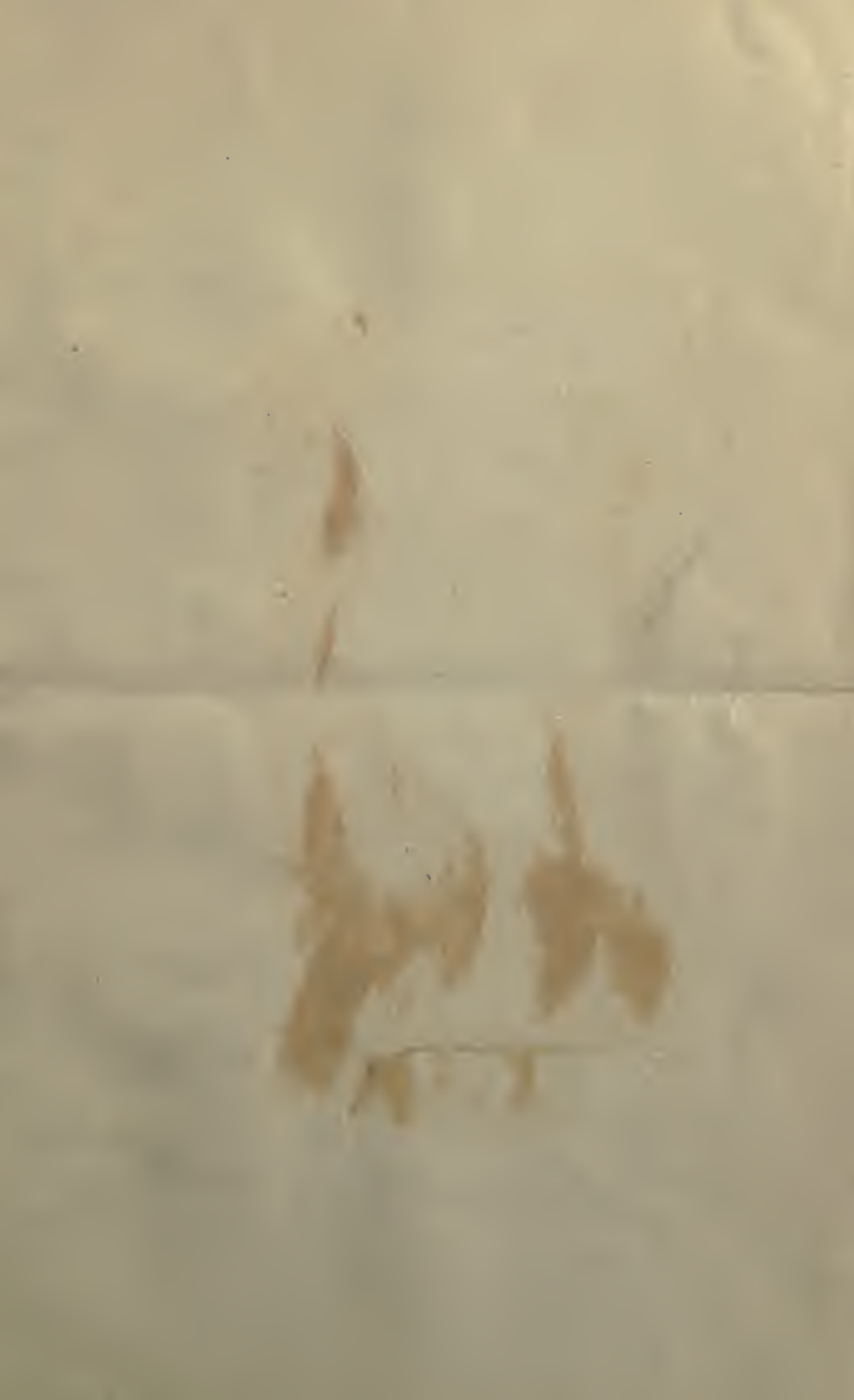
Lord Atholstan is today a man of 82, but for all of that he continues to take an active part in the business affairs of the Star. Only about two years ago he purchased the Lord Strathcona property in Montreal, and has converted it into a home for the Presbyterian congregations on Montreal Island. The home cost, according to reports, a million dollars. The mansion is known as "My Mother's Home." This home was so dedicated by His Lordship, and as visitors enter the reception room they will see two portraits in particular, they being the likenesses of the founder's parents. The estate has been endowed by Lord Atholstan, so that it becomes no burden to the church. The ladies who are cared for at this home are greatly indebted to His Lordship for his kindness. Lord Atholstan continues to visit "His Mother's Home" at very frequent intervals.

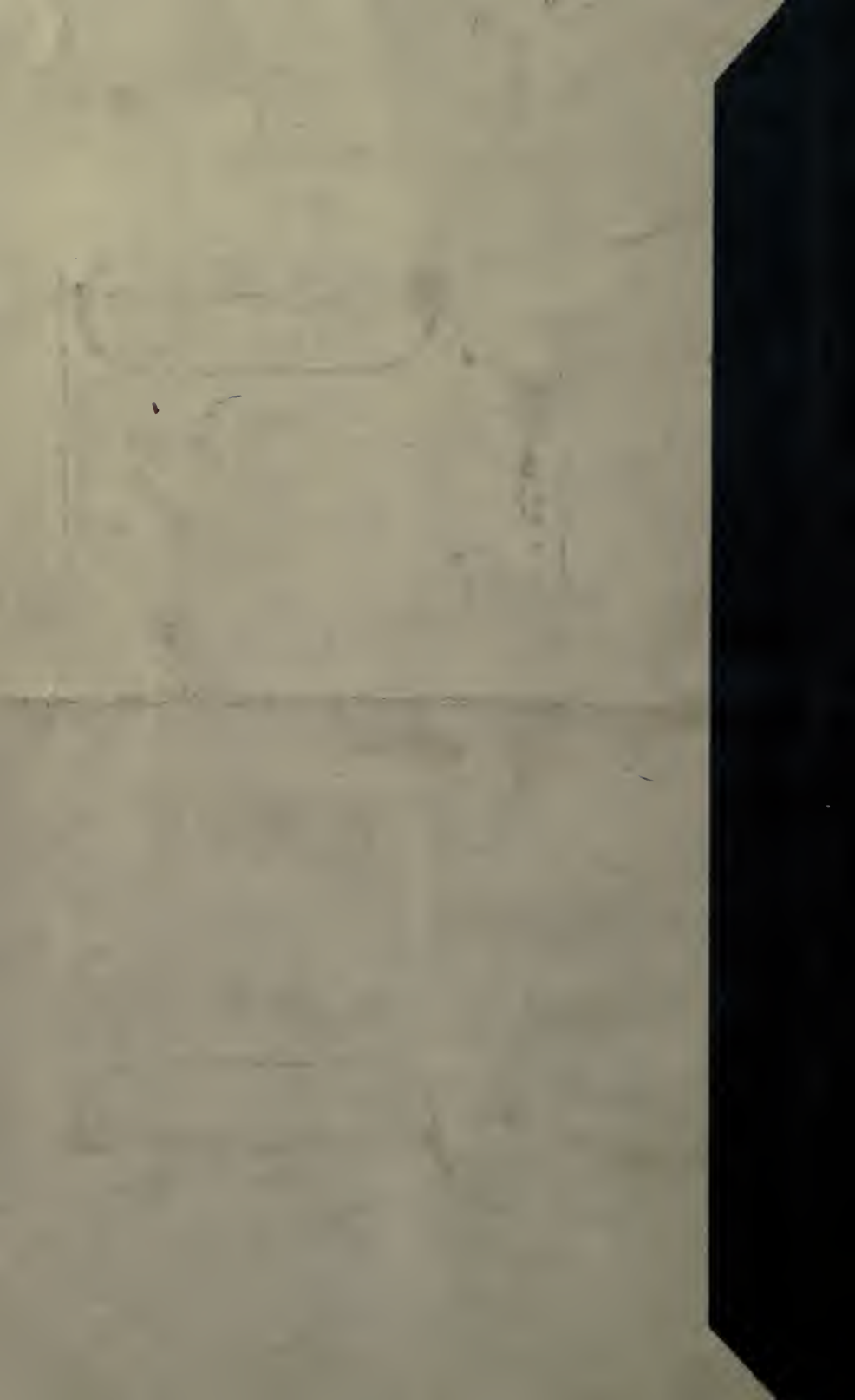
During the hard winters of 1921, 1922 and 1923, His Lordship saw to the feeding of the unemployed of the city, and nearly 200,000 meals were served to men, women and children. During the past winter (1930) he sponsored a relief kitchen for the benefit of the unemployed. The soup kitchen, which was known as the "Atholstan Star Relief Kitchen" proved to be a great relief for the 1000 to 2000 men that would call each day for their subsistence. The entire expense was borne by His Lordship, who at all times has considered it his pleasure to be allowed to assist the destitute who are unable to provide for themselves on account of circumstances over which they have no control.

Lord Atholstan—then Hugh Graham—in March, 1891, married Miss Annie Beekman Hamilton, of Montreal. There is an only daughter, Hon. Alice Graham, who, on June 18, 1925, was married to Bernard Marsham Hallward, son of the late Rev. Thomas W. O. and Mrs. Hallward, of Frittenden, Kent, England. Two sons have been born of this marriage.









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